

## Language analysis- Planking/Social Media – Class model

Death caused by social media misuse has been highlighted in recent weeks in many media forums. The Opinion Piece, “What is wrong with the Youth of today?” written by Horace Brown published in the Melbourne Weekly times on the 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2011, contends that the youth of Australia need to stop using social media to outdo each other. Similarly, with the same contention, a second Opinion Piece “There’s a fine (on) line between comedy and tragedy,” written by Dave O’Neil was published in the Age on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2011. Supporting these articles are three photos. Firstly, Queenslander Acton Beale (The Associated Press), secondly soldier Sgt Wood (Reuters) and an image by Dan Cutty of celebrity presenter/footballer, Sam Newman engaged in planking. These images have been chosen in order to support both authors’ main contentions. Both Brown and O’Neil have each used emotional appeals and a range of strategies in order to position the reader to their main contentions.

Writers often appeal to their readers sense of patriotism and common sense. Appeals are used by both authors to generate different emotions in their readers. Brown, as a member of the Returned Services League, appeals to a sense of patriotism through his description of the tragedy of the death of an Australian soldier and as well as the use of an accompanying image of the soldier himself. The article generates an appeal to patriotism in the reader by saying, “Another brave, loyal and heroic young Australian soldier has paid the ultimate sacrifice, their life for all of the things we hold so dearly in our country.” On the other hand O’Neil has used an appeal to common sense to those who think that entertainment involves risky behaviour published upon social media networks. “We must make a pact,” this conveys that the younger generation of Australians need to stop with the dangerous acts before more are injured or killed. The reader is made to think that we must come together to stop the stupidity of youth, this is conveyed through a comedic tone in order not to accuse directly. The accompanying image of Acton Beale, provokes the reader to grieve the loss of life of the young Australian because the image shows how happy he was. His death was a waste because he looked so happy, then within a stupid act he loses his life. Another way these authors have persuaded their intended audience is through the use of generalisation and inclusive language.

Separating people into certain groups causes them to believe certain ideas. Both O’Neill and Brown’s articles use inclusive language and a generalization for the purpose of persuading the reader to agree with their contention. O’Neill states that “it’s time for all of us to make a pact to stop doing stupid things for the internet.” He has used the term “all of us” in an attempt to influence the reader to feel as though they are included in mainstream Australia. By including the reader, O’Neill attempts to make them feel a connection to the issue and influences the reader’s views towards social media and the danger in following trends. Along with inclusive language, O’Neill also uses a generalization. He states that “these days

every bit of stupidity has to be photographed and shared around the world.” The inclusive language assists this idea as he has already removed themselves from the group who participates in these actions and the reader is now identifying more so with O’Neil. The generalization aims to make the reader feel as though misuse of social networking is the cause of stupidity and eventual downfall. Therefore, making them not want to be associated with the people in this group. Likewise, Brown also uses inclusive language in his article. Brown states that “...we see these forms of communication as just that, forms of communication,” combining inclusive language with a generalization. The author has utilized the term “we” to similarly position the reader to feel included in the group that use social media in the correct way intended. The reader is then persuaded to feel outraged at the actions of those who are misusing networking sites. This statement made by Brown is directed at an older generation and it makes them feel distant towards the younger generations and as though they are irresponsible in their use of the internet. In order to persuade the reader of their contention, both writers have used inclusive language and a generalization.

Both the articles have used contrasting persuasive techniques in order to achieve a similar effect. O’Neil’s article champions the notion that the youth of Australia misuse social media as a way of showing off, which can result in tragedy. His Opinion Piece is aimed at the youth of today as O’Neil employs the use of an anecdote about himself and how he did something dangerous in an attempt to impress people. He uses his own personal experience of breaking his leg in an act of stupidity to convey to the reader that putting yourself in danger “Is not worth it.” The reader is left with the understanding that if it can happen to Beale and O’Neil, it can happen to anyone. On the other hand, in response to the stupidity within the social media that lead to the death of Acton Beale, Brown aims his article at the people within society that do not partake in dangerous internet sensations. Brown attacks the general public including civil libertarians, parents and everyone else who allows acts of stupidity to continue within social media. Brown antagonises the reader by making them feel the youth of today are stupid for engaging in such stupid behaviours. As well as the two articles, three images have supported the issue of social media being taken to the extreme. O’Neil is supported by the image of Sam Newman planking on the balcony of his 40m high apartment and Acton Beale who died doing the same thing. Both images use emotional appeals to sadden the reader about the lost life and anger the reader that someone within the media was insensitive as to go and perform a stunt that recently caused the death of Acton Beale. The image of Sgt Wood that supports Browns article further saddens the reader that such a heroic man with the rest of his life to live died defending our country, while Acton Beale lost his life partaking in a dangerous stunt.

Both Opinion Pieces, ‘What is wrong with the youth of today’ by RSL Director Horace Brown and ‘There’s a fine (on) line between comedy and tragedy’ by Dave O’Neil and three photos

by various sources explore the issue of social media and the extremes that young people go to in order to post about themselves. The use of social media for young people to act in more and more dangerous and stupid ways has been attacked by both Brown and O'Neil through a combination of inclusive language, generalizations and appeals to their readers' patriotism and common sense. The hauntingly similar photos of two young, deceased Australian men highlight the futility of planking and social media and reiterate to the readers the need to act in mature and responsible ways.